



CALFED
BAY-DELTA
PROGRAM

Public Comment

Date Sep. 23, 1999

The CALFED Bay-Delta Program welcomes your participation. Please use the space below for your written comments (attach additional sheets if necessary).

Comments:

Please see attached.

Name: Bruce Blodgett

Organization: _____

Address: 9313 Laguna Lake Way


Elk Grove, CA 95758

Phone: 691-6419 Fax: _____

Would you like to be added to
our mailing list?

☒ Check Here

Please return this form to:

 CALFED
BAY-DELTA
PROGRAM
1416 Ninth St., #1155
Sacramento, CA 95814

For more information,
(916) 657-2666
(800) 700-5752
<http://calfed.ca.gov>

September 23, 1999

Calfed Bay-Delta Program
1416 Ninth Street, #1155
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Calfed participants:

My family has a farm in the Delta region (Sutter Island) and a small cattle ranch in Amador County. It is from that perspective, that I submit comments.

I am concerned that the Calfed plan is flawed as it places the entire burden of meeting our state's water needs on the back of agriculture. Calfed also operates under the premise that water should be allocated to fish, people and if any is leftover, agriculture.

Your program is destined for failure and will end up hurting the environment. The elimination of water supplies for agriculture will lead to the premature development of farm land. When the dust settles, California will consist of numerous subdivisions, strip malls and other development surrounded by the occasional sliver of habitat that some group will proudly proclaim "it was purchased with Calfed funds."

The loss of agricultural land in our state far exceeds the loss of any other resources. During one five-year period (1992-1997), California lost 1.3 million acres of farmland.

Calfed should provide ample water supplies and regulatory relief to farmers and ranchers who want to keep their land in agriculture. There is no question that we need additional water storage facilities. Building additional reservoirs will create some short term environmental impacts, but will create additional water supplies needed for all uses. It's time to raise Shasta Dam, build Auburn Dam and look at other sites.

It's also time to look at rivers like the Cosumnes. There are already many small diversions on this river so it's far from "pristine." During the recent droughts, no salmon or steelhead could be found swimming up the Cosumnes. It was dry. During that time, various groups were trying to list several species of fish because numbers were decreasing.

It is not a surprise that when average and above average rainfall returned, so did the fish.

My family owned property on the Cosumnes River where the Folsom-South Canal goes under the river. In January 1997, my brother and his son tried desperately to reach my father who was working on the river levee. As they crossed Deer Creek, my brother knew there was a problem. He expected high water in trying to reach the levee, but this water was coming from an unexpected direction. The water was rising quickly and it became clear the levee on the Cosumnes had already broken.

The old tractor my brother was driving moved slowly through the rising water. When he reached our neighbor's pear orchard, it appeared the tractor would falter and he was getting ready to push his young son into one of the pear trees and jump off the tractor.

But it did not stall. After desperate moments the tractor climbed through the water and finally reached the Cosumnes River levee that was our eastern border. My brother, nephew and father then worked to stabilize a failing levee. They used old hay bales, shovels and tractors to plug the many leaks that occurred due to gopher holes, and the impact of trees that are now allowed to flourish in the waterway. These trees tear the levee apart as they fall in the high flows.

My family members were successful in maintaining our portion of the levee, but only because the levee broke elsewhere. Our farm was flooded. Many homes were destroyed. And then, my mother and brother's wife were told to evacuate the home where I was raised. They were forced to evacuate the home with my father, brother and his son now trapped on the river levee and the Folsom-South Canal. Two helicopters were brought in to rescue my family members from the levee. They were clearly shaken, but safe.

You may ask yourself why family members would risk their lives to fight such a battle. In the 1950's a similar flood occurred. During that time one of the large breaks happened on my family's property. The farm went into so much debt, that we barely survived. My father was determined to keep that from happening again and it nearly cost him his life and the lives of his son and grandson.

My mother and father sold that farm that year!

We should learn from the floods that occurred in 97 and 98. The flooding on the Cosumnes could be prevented. First, Calfed should address the impacts of habitat created within our flood control systems. The trees that grow within the levees undermine the integrity of the levee system in high flows. When trees are ripped out by rushing water, they destroy the levees.

Calfed must address the importance of proper maintenance of our levee system. The Cosumnes has habitat for elderberry beetles and other federally listed species. Because of restrictions placed on the reclamation district by Fish and Game and the Fish and Wildlife Service, we could not properly maintain the levee to protect humans, or property. There were no winners when the Cosumnes broke. Farms and homes were decimated and the species drowned in the floods. Calfed must make it clear that the first priority for our levee systems is flood control.

- We have heard the stories where people quote how many fish were in the river at some historical point. Most often, the time when fish numbers were the highest, coincide with the most aggressive management of our levees and rivers including dredging and properly maintaining the levee system. This holds true on the Cosumnes.

Calfed must also address the need for water storage and flood control facilities. The Cosumnes would be a prime candidate. This is a river that floods during years of normal rainfall only to stop running in the same year.

Building a reservoir on the Cosumnes would allow for the capture of flood flows that occur almost every year so water could be used for fish, farming and people. We could also improve the flood protection for those who reside in the area.

Greater flood protection and water supplies for all users. That's how you improve the Delta and that is how we should plan for the future of California.

My family's farm in the Delta is on Sutter Island. We need to plan for the future of this land, but cannot because of Calfed. The Calfed process must be opened up to identify all lands currently targeted for retirement. The current process of acquiring lands without public review or scrutiny is unacceptable. To not let my family know if our land is targeted for acquisition is criminal.

Furthermore, Calfed land acquisition should operate under the following principle, no net loss of private farmland.

A sustainable economy in California is dependent on a healthy agricultural economy. Calfed should change its focus from land acquisition to voluntary means designed to keep land in productive agricultural uses.

Some will claim you should do more to preserve wetlands. According to studies completed by the Resources Agency, our state already achieves a net gain in wetlands resources.

Others will claim we need to preserve land for listed species. More than 75% of all listed species occupy privately-owned lands already because farmers and ranchers provide high quality habitat. The real threat is not farming, it is the regulations that turn farmers into developers. For example, the Calfed plan will greatly reduce agriculture's water supplies and the regulation of common farm practices under the guise of providing clean water.

The Calfed focus should change to voluntarily protect lands like my family's small cattle ranch in Amador County. This ranch is owned by two families. It is 900 acres and is worth \$1500 per acre. I know its worth this much, because we have already been offered that amount by an interested buyer. This price is too high to keep the land in agriculture. The interested buyer was going to subdivide the land into home sites.

- I would like to buy this ranch and keep it in agriculture. I would like to plant vineyards on a portion of the land, but water supplies would need to be augmented. Without sufficient water, this is not an acceptable risk for the banks or me.

I could buy cattle for this land, but there is no way I can afford to pay this much money to keep the land in ranching, unless I can live to be 200 years old (not likely).

I could harvest the timber and create a sustainable timber operation on the higher reaches of the land. This would reduce the tremendous fire hazard that currently exists and provide a product needed by the general public. After reviewing the new state generated forestry regulations, I have concluded that this is not an option.

I would like nothing more than to buy this ranch and improve its health and productivity, but I cannot afford to do so because there is insufficient funds for me to obtain a conservation easement. To be viable, the price of the conservation easement would have to be nearly equivalent to the purchase price of the land. Currently, that is not the practice.

If you ask yourself why Calfed should care about a ranch in Amador County, the answer is simple.

Our ranch will probably be sold in the next couple of years to a developer. On what is now 900 acres of oak woodlands mixed with some timber, there will be 90 or more homes built, with all of the amenities (new roads, more runoff and a greater demand for water supplies).

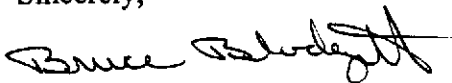
The runoff flows through a nameless natural drainage, that flows to a larger drainage that after merging with others, reaches Dry Creek. Dry Creek in turn flows near the town of Galt and meets up with the Mokelumne River, which of course, reaches the Delta.

You will not be successful if you go to Amador County trying to stop development applications like this. The project will be approved and once again you will see water demands and urban runoff increasing.

Calfed needs to drastically alter its focus. The reason there is so much habitat left in California has been the development of privately-owned and productive farms and ranches. I would like to make our ranch in Amador County a diversified, productive and ecologically healthy operation. It should be your goal as well.

For Calfed to be successful it must increase water supplies and develop incentives to encourage agricultural operations to stay in agriculture. If Calfed does not change its focus to address these issues, it is destined for failure.

Sincerely,



Bruce Blodgett
9313 Laguna Lake Way
Elk Grove, CA 95758